



FACULTY OF ARTS Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

SUPERVISOR'S REPORT

Adéla Hezinová, "The ground possessed and repossessed": The Trope of the Feminized Land in Seamus Heaney's *North*

The candidate has set herself a challenging task in this thesis – to examine the female personification of land / Ireland in a wide context that encompasses writings from the Middle Ages up to the present day. The focus of the dissertation is the first part of Seamus Heaney's collection *North* (1975), which reflects the violence of the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland through the medium of metaphor and myth. The dissertation offers two contexts for the interpretation of Heaney's poems – the various historical transmutations of the trope in the Irish tradition and the recent feminist critique of Heaney's approach. Despite the distance in time, the two contexts are interconnected as some contemporary women poets and critics who have challenged Heaney have also used the tradition of the female personification of land, transforming and subverting it in their various works.

The thesis, in general, succeeds well in interweaving the heterogeneous material. The second chapter, which traces the development of the trope from its medieval forms up to the present, was also the most challenging one as it implied sifting through a large corpus of material in order to pinpoint representative trends relevant to the argument. The candidate has located a number of motifs from the tradition that were later used, reflected or transformed in Heaney's poetry – the sovereignty myth, the *cailleach-spéirbhean* transformation, the connection of the sexual and the political, but interestingly also the recurring criticism of the symbolic woman as somewhat morally reprehensible. Hezinová locates the last of the motifs in early dinnseanchas tales, seventeenth century Counter-Reformation poetry as well as in Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan, and relates it in various ways to Seamus Heaney's bog poems. This constitutes an original contribution to the field as such a nuanced positioning of Heaney within the tradition has not yet been done by critics.

The third chapter consists of a close analysis of a number of Heaney's poems from *North*, focusing on the mixing of the feminine and the geographical, the various uses of the image of bog bodies, as well as the portrayal of Irish-British relations through the metaphor of rape. The poems are extensively analysed while taking existing secondary literature into account, and the connection to the earlier manifestations of the trope as well as the later feminist critique is maintained throughout. The political implications of the poems are discussed when appropriate; more prominence could be, perhaps, given to poems such as "Hercules and Antaeus", "Aisling" or "Bone Dreams", whose political message is enigmatic and ambiguous. The last chapter, which focuses on the reflection of Heaney by women poets and critics, is relatively short, but succeeds in showing the problematic features of many poems in *North*, as well as in exemplifying the innovative, playful or straightforwardly iconoclastic approach to the tradition on the part of some women poets. Hezinová shows that despite many reversals and subversions in Heaney's poems, his use of the female personification of land is fairly conventional, while poets such as Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Bidy Jenkinson have directly challenged established stereotypes as well as drawn attention to some subversive texts from within the tradition itself.



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The thesis is written in good academic English with some minor mistakes, and complies well to all the formal requirements. The candidate has regularly consulted the thesis with the supervisor and has meticulously integrated his comments into the final version.

Suggested questions at the defence:

Could the candidate summarize the political views expressed in Heaney's poems analysed in the thesis? While some of them clearly portray Ireland as a victim of England, others resist any straightforward interpretation. In what way does the trope of the feminized land help Heaney to make his points?

The thesis implies that the first part of *North* partially retains its merits *vis-à-vis* the feminist critique. Could the candidate formulate more clearly in what respects it does and in what respects it does not?

Without hesitation, I **recommend** the thesis for defence and suggest that it should be classified as **excellent** (výborně), subject to a successful viva.

Radvan Markus, Ph.D.
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